

~~SECRET~~

WH File

Sent to WH,
OOB, 28 Sept

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
28 September 1961

OCI No. 0075/61

Copy No.

100

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Revolt in Syria

1. Early this morning elements of the UAR First (Syrian) Army seized control of the Damascus Radio and the Damascus airport and broadcast a number of communiqués claiming that a new "revolutionary movement" had taken over control of all Syria. Broadcasts claimed that UAR Vice President Amir, Nasir's viceroy in Syria, and First Army commander General Faysal had been arrested, and that the coup group, identified as the "Supreme Arab Revolutionary Command of the Armed Forces," had received messages of support from a number of First Army units.

2. As of 0700 EDT this morning, however, the situation was by no means clear. The First Army garrison at Aleppo was broadcasting a denial that it had given the Damascus group its support, and a late communiqué from the rebel group in Damascus said the "problem of the army" had been submitted to Amir, and he had taken measures to solve these problems in the "interests of the army and the UAR."

3. Whether or not the Damascus coup has in fact been a short-lived one, Nasir's problems in Syria are not over. Syrian discontent with Egypt's domination of the UAR has long posed a threat to Nasir's control of the UAR's Northern Region. Any mediation efforts by Amir are likely to end in some concessions to Syrian autonomy if further violence is to be avoided. Nasir himself this morning described the Damascus revolt as more serious for Arab unity than the 1956 Suez affair.

State Department review completed

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

4. The US Consulate General in Damascus understands that the actual execution of the coup was carried out by Brigadier Duhman (commander of the Qatana garrison, 20 miles southwest of Damascus) and reported that as of 0900 local time the situation was calm following an early morning half-hour fight.

5. The group's pronouncements have not mentioned Nasir by name nor declared an intention to dissolve the Egyptian-Syrian union. One communiqué, however, states that the movement has been carried out by "the struggling Arab people in Syria and Egypt," suggesting the group may have hoped that it would receive support from its military counterparts in Egypt. The UAR Second (Egyptian) Army is generally considered wholly loyal to the Nasir regime.

6. The Syrian group proclaimed from the beginning that the movement was not undertaken in the name of any individual. No mention has been made of UAR Vice President Abd al-Hamid Sarraj, former Syrian strong man whose resignation on 26 September set the stage for the revolt.

7. No significant reactions have been noted as yet from other Arab states or Israel. Both King Hussayn of Jordan and Iraqi Prime Minister Qasim, however, would probably welcome the blow that Nasir's prestige would suffer from a dissolution of the UAR and would not be above rendering support to Syrian separatism. Israel also would be pleased to see Nasir receive such a grave political defeat, but is unlikely to interfere unless a spread of military activity threatens its security.

SECRET